

# AVERY

MESSENGER

SUMMER 2014

*Remember* **DENMARK VESEY** *of Charleston!*



A Publication of the

**AVERY RESEARCH CENTER**

FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

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**ON THE FRONT COVER**

In this issue of the *Avery Messenger*, we celebrate the very first statue of an African American in Charleston, SC. This monument of African-American icon Denmark Vesey (circa 1767-July 2, 1822) is not only historical, but it is also a powerful show of remembrance. It will no doubt encourage further dialogue about slavery, freedom, race, heroism, resistance, and justice.



The cover image is a tight head shot in profile of the monument. Photograph by Ramona LaRoche  
 Website: <http://www.gullahgal.com/>

**ABOUT THE MONUMENT**

The bronze sculpture of Denmark Vesey is 7 feet high, and weighs 400 pounds. Vesey is shown holding his carpentry bag with tools, his hat and his Bible.

The granite Vesey pedestal is 44 ¾ inches square x 59 inches high, and weighs 1800 pounds.

The pedestal is inscribed on two sides with biographical and historical information about Denmark Vesey and the conspiracy. The monument was sculpted by Ed Dwight, Sculptor and Historian.

Website: <http://www.eddwright.com>



Denmark Vesey monument in Hampton Park, Charleston, SC. Photograph by Daron Calhoun

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## AVERY RESEARCH CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

PATRICIA WILLIAMS LESSANE, PHD

Dear Friends,

This past winter and spring, the Avery Research Center has been incredibly busy providing quality public programming, excellent archival and research support, and stellar educational outreach. It is also my pleasure to announce that the hard work of the Avery Research Center team has resulted in a \$75,000 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant. Led by filmmaker Julie Dash, the Avery Research Center will create and produce a documentary about the remarkable life and work of South Carolina's very own Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor—writer, actress, and culinary anthropologist.

This award means a great deal to me because I have been an avid moviegoer since I was a child. I owe my love affair with movies to my oldest brother James, my father's namesake, whom we call "Jimmie Lee." For as far back as I can remember, my brother would wake me up Saturday mornings, after completing the late shift at work, take me to breakfast at Miss Muffet's, and then downtown to the McVicker or the Chicago Theater for the early show. Some Saturdays, we stayed on the south side and headed to the Rhodes Theater in the heart of the Black middle-class neighborhood of Chatham. With popcorn, goobers, and pop, we'd sit back and watch all types of movies—*Dracula*, *Godzilla*, and then later *The Wiz*, *The Blues Brothers*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. We never said a word during the movies. Instead, we waited until we got back to the car to compare notes on what we thought were the best parts of the films. My brother still loves to watch movies and so do I, which is why receiving the NEA to produce a film with Julie Dash is that more meaningful.

Also upcoming is a stellar slate of public programs and exhibits planned for next fall, including our 2014 Avery Research Symposium "The Marrow of Tradition: The Black Film in the American Cinematic Tradition," which will celebrate and explore African Americans and film. However, I would be remiss if I did not highlight some of our spectacular spring programs, including lectures by artist Alfred Conteh, historian Amrita Myers, graphic novelist and scholar John Jennings, and exhibitions featuring the work of Floyd Gordon and Candace Hunter. Our work with Hunter reflects the vanguard work of The College of Charleston's Gender and Sexuality Equity Center (GSEC) under the direction of Dr. Hollis France. Hunter's exhibition entitled *Dust in Their Veins* draws attention to the global scarcity of clean water and its impact on women, girls, and children. It has been a pleasure working with Hunter, France, and GSEC!

In closing, I'd like to thank you for your continued support. It means a great deal to me.

Sincerely,  
pwl



## AVERY INSTITUTE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

CATHERINE E. BOAGS

Hello Everyone,

Another year has swiftly passed and we at the Avery Institute held this year's Annual Meeting on June 28, 2014. This year's program highlighted the work of Dr. Lela Haynes Session, a Jeanes Teacher from Moncks Corner, South Carolina, who worked tirelessly in the field of education. She was a role model, educator, and mentor to thousands of people who have gone on to make a difference in their respective communities. Dr. Session received the South Carolina Order of the Palmetto Award for her lifetime dedication of service to the people of Berkeley County and the State of South Carolina.

The annual report of the operations of the Avery Institute was also presented at the Annual Meeting. Board members for the new fiscal year were introduced as well.

The Avery Institute continues to support the Avery Research Center in its goal to acquire noteworthy collections and provide programs of interest to the Charleston community. I want to encourage each of you to continue your support by attending the programs that are held and to make a yearly financial commitment to the Avery Institute. The Avery Institute is a nonprofit organization, and your contributions are tax deductible as charitable contributions.

The Avery Institute Board does not normally meet in July or August. The Board will be meeting again in September. In the interim, I want to wish everyone a very enjoyable summer!

# ARCHIVE NEWS

by Georgette Mayo & Aaron Spelbring

## RECENTLY PROCESSED COLLECTIONS

### **Sherry A. Suttles Collection of Atlantic Beach**

Sherry A. Suttles is a former government administrator, entrepreneur, and historian who established the Atlantic Beach Chamber of Commerce and the Atlantic Beach Historical Society (ABHS, 2001) in Horry County, South Carolina. Established in the 1930s, Atlantic Beach became a vacation mecca for African Americans during segregation. The Atlantic Beach Company, comprised of physicians from North Carolina and South Carolina, expanded development from 1943 until 1956. Known as "The Black Pearl," vacationers traveled by the busload for the recreation and entertainment it provided. The Town of Atlantic Beach, chartered in 1966 with Emery Gore and Millard Rucker as its initial mayors, is one of the few oceanfront communities owned and governed by African Americans in the United States. Thousands of tourists continue to flock to Atlantic Beach for the nationally recognized African-American motorcycle event BikeFest (also known as Black Bikers Week) held annually during the Memorial Day weekend. The bulk of this collection holds documents and visual and audio recordings related to the establishment and functions of the Atlantic Beach Historical Society, Inc. Also included are recorded histories, The Colored Wall Oral History Project, from former and present residents of Atlantic Beach. Of note is Suttles's extensive research and manuscript for the published book, *Images of America: Atlantic Beach* (2009). The second half of the collection focuses on The Town of Atlantic Beach as it relates to its administration, with materials pertaining to BikeFest and Suttles's ABHS-sponsored programs during this annual event. The Suttles Collection of Atlantic Beach contains documents from 1929-2009, with bulk dates ranging from 2001-2007. [http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Suttles\\_Sherry.html](http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Suttles_Sherry.html)

### **DeReef Court and Park Collection**

Donated by Mary S. Miller, a former librarian, community activist, and resident of the Radcliffeborough community, the DeReef Court and Park Collection relates the rich origins and challenge for survival as a community park in the City of Charleston, South Carolina. DeReef Court is a former African-American residential housing community established in 1854. This location was named after Joseph and Richard Edward DeReef, free men of color who were successful entrepreneurial brothers. Presently, the residential park known as DeReef Park represents the last green space in the Cannonborough/Elliottborough neighborhood. The collection holds ancestral histories, photocopied deeds, and census reports regarding the DeReef brothers; documents regarding United Missionary Chapel at 9 DeReef Court; information regarding Cannonborough/Elliottborough and Radcliffeborough neighborhoods; the "Save DeReef Park" initiative; and transcripts from community residents' interviews, including Averyite, Lois A. Simms. Also included are City of Charleston planning commission reports, city council minutes, and meeting notes taken by Mary Miller. This collection's inclusive dates range from 1854-2012, bulk dates from 1990-2012. [http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/DeReef\\_Court.html](http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/DeReef_Court.html)

### **Wilmot J. Fraser Elementary School Collection**

The former Wilmot J. Fraser Elementary School was located at 63 Columbus Street in downtown Charleston, South Carolina. Initially known as the Columbus Street School, this institution was named in honor of Wilmot Jefferson Fraser (1905-1979), an African-American educator and administrator in Charleston, South Carolina. As a part of the Charleston School District 20's redesign plan, Fraser Elementary closed at the conclusion of the 2008-2009 school year. The majority of this collection consists of color photographs from 1990-1994, and most are of school events, students, teachers, staff, parents, and visiting presenters. Also included are programs, newsletters, memorandums, and newspaper articles regarding special events and honor roll students. [http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Wilmot\\_Fraser\\_Elementary.html](http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Wilmot_Fraser_Elementary.html)

### **Carr Family Papers**

The Carr Family was central in the African-American community known as Maryville, South Carolina. Thomas Tobias Carr, Sr. (born 1863) was the last mayor to serve the town. His wife, Mary Green Carr (deceased 1963) was a dressmaker and licensed midwife. The Carr Family Papers includes correspondence, photographs, school-related materials (ex. diplomas), a family scrapbook, and other materials collected and/or generated by family members: Rosemary and Thomas Tobias Carr, III, and Mildred and John Wesley Carr, Sr., among others. Included is a section regarding the formation and history of Maryville, South Carolina, originating from the former Lords Proprietors Plantation, by founder Mary Mathews Just, with brief information on Mayor Thomas T. Carr, Sr. Also, included are documents generated from the Maryville/Ashleyville Neighborhood Association with materials regarding the Township of Maryville Historic Marker Dedication (1996). The Carr Family Papers holds documents from around 1671-2009, with the bulk ranging from 1920-1995. [http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Carr\\_Family.html](http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Carr_Family.html)

### **Gourdine Papers**

Julia Waites Alston Gourdine (1923-2009), was an African-American elementary school educator who worked in the Charleston County School District for thirty-five years. Alston Gourdine was also an integral Senior Trustee Board member of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in Charleston, South Carolina. She married Robert H. Gourdine, Jr. in 1944, and they had one son, Robert H. Gourdine, III. The collection contains documents and photographs relating to Gourdine's education, professional, civic, and social affiliations, along with materials and photographs belonging to several of her family members, including her mother, Addie Middleton Alston. The majority of the collection contains materials pertaining to "Mother" Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and is reflective of Gourdine's position of secretary on the Senior Trustee Board.

## ACQUISITIONS

• **Mrs. Winifred Sanders**, Charleston, SC donated *Gele Women*. The quilt, depicting the profiles of three women, is 100% cotton fabric and woven kente cloth embellished with cowrie shells, beads, and buttons designed and created by Sanders.

• **Ernest M. Comar, Jr.**, Mount Pleasant, SC, donated two (2) Western Union Telegrams regarding Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death and funeral arrangements, sent to Comar as the President of Catholic Human Relations Council, (39 Bennett Street, Charleston, SC ( 5 & 7 Apr, 1968) and The Manning Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) program for the Tribute to Roy Wilkins celebrating "thirty-six years of service and leadership in the fight for freedom" (1 Nov 1968).

• **Cynthia McCottry-Smith, c/o The Phillis Wheatley Literary and Social Club**, Charleston, SC gifted one (1) Phillis Wheatley Literary and Social Club DVD/CD.

• **Exhibits USA and NEH on the Road**, facilitated through the Mid-Atlantic Arts Alliance, graciously donated a vast collection of Sweetgrass baskets, artifacts, and materials featured in the *Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art* exhibit. The donation includes a variety of basket designs, sizes, and origins. Sweetgrass baskets are from Sapelo Island, Mt. Pleasant, McClellanville, and Charleston, South Carolina. The

collection also includes baskets made in several African countries; Senegal, Nigeria, Botswana, Cameroon, and South Africa. A coiled basket from Bangladesh is also included. While the majority of the baskets were created in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the oldest, a cowrie shell basket from Nigeria, dates circa 1890.

Also included in this donation are educational materials depicting rice cultivation, which are actively utilized in Avery Research Center's numerous education outreach programs.

• A frequent donor to the Avery Research Center's artifact collection, **George Pope** of Charleston, SC, gifted eight Nigerian artifacts and textiles. Included are several batik wall hangings; an Abuja pottery lidded jar; miniature Thorn Tree carvings, and a lyallu GanGan drum, considered "the Mother of talking drums amongst the Yoruba people of Nigeria."

• **The Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University** donated reference copies to us from their collection of Mary Arnold Twining's field recordings from 1966 and 1967 on Johns Island. Several of the recordings feature gospel singer Bessie Jones performing at the Progressive Club and at the Johns Island Presbyterian Church.

• **Ambassador Daouda Diabate of the Republique de Cote d'Ivoire** (Republic of Ivory Coast), gifted the Avery Research Center a large-sized authentic indigo handwoven cloth textile.

## MORE NEWS



**Aaron Spelbring**, Manager of Archival Services, has been named as a Community Representative for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). The Community

Reps Program works with the community outreach arm of DPLA to educate and promote the DPLA as a public access resource to cultural heritage content. The Avery Research Center's digital collections are available in the DPLA through the Lowcountry Digital Library and the South Carolina Digital Library.

The Digital Public Library of America is an all-digital library that aggregates metadata—information describing an item—and thumbnails for millions of photographs, manuscripts, books, sounds, moving images, and more from libraries, archives, and museums around the United States. DPLA brings together the riches of America's libraries, archives, and museums and makes them freely available to the world.

### Philip Simmons Digital Collection



Philip Simmons original sketch of the gazebo art work for the Charleston International Airport

We have recently completed the digitization of a portion of our Philip Simmons Papers ([http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Simmons\\_Philip.html](http://avery.cofc.edu/archives/Simmons_Philip.html)). Digitized materials include photographs, original drawings, architectural drawings, and correspondence from the collection. This digital collection can be accessed through the Lowcountry Digital Library (<http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/content/philip-simmons-collection>)

# “Remember DENMARK VESEY of Charleston!” †

By Deborah Wright & Daron Calhoun

~Frederick Douglass

Denmark Vesey, also known as Telemaque, was an enslaved African man who won a lottery and purchased his freedom. Vesey is most noted for planning an extensive slave rebellion in South Carolina. When word of the plan was leaked, Vesey and all associated with the planning were arrested before the uprising could begin. Vesey was convicted and executed with thirty-four others in Charleston, SC in 1822. The charge, attempting to incite an armed slave rebellion.

The Denmark Vesey and the Spirit of Freedom Monument Committee formed in 1996. Eighteen years later, the committee was able to erect a monument to Denmark Vesey in Hampton Park, Charleston, SC. It was unveiled on Saturday, February 15, 2014. Featured here in their own words are committee members Curtis J. Franks (Avery Research Center), Charleston County Councilman Henry E. Darby, and College of Charleston’s Professor of History, Dr. Bernard Powers, who share their views on Denmark Vesey and some of the behind-the-scenes work done to establish the Vesey monument. The full transcript of Curtis Franks’s interview, which was conducted and transcribed by Avery Research Center Graduate Assistant Daron Calhoun, is available on the Avery Research Center website: [avery.cofc.edu](http://avery.cofc.edu).

## UNDERSTANDING THE DENMARK VESEY STORY AND WHY A MONUMENT TO SUCH A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE

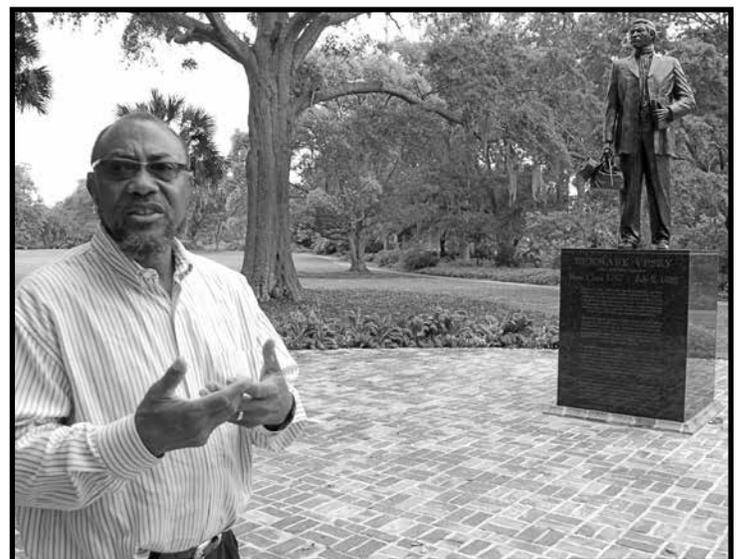
**Curtis J. Franks:** You know what, controversial to whom? That’s the question. To us, it wasn’t controversial. It made sense. It’s a very human story. It’s like, if you were to deny me control of my own person or the little place I’m paying mortgage on, the very human thing is to respond, is to alleviate that. That’s very human. That’s what this country was born out of. It’s trying to alleviate, to eradicate, oppression. That’s what it is—which is very human. Here was an enslaved person who was worldly, traveled—learned trade as a carpenter. [In] 1799, he plays the lottery and he wins [a sum of money]. So at that point, the law is such that it’s not [just] about having the means. He needed the permission of someone who owned him. And that permission was granted. So here’s 1799...he’s purchased his freedom...he’s about to begin a new century in new conditions. There’s something new; this very euphoric kind of feeling...then the other part of it was, there were those that he loved [his wife and children]; and [with the] money he had left—here again, it wasn’t [just] about having the means—he needed permission [to purchase their freedom], which was denied. Imagine that’s you. You are [now] free and then you have loved ones that are enslaved. Imagine you go from this tremendous high to this low. So you want to remedy that situation; anybody would. So [Vesey] begins to plan [the “remedy” for] this situation, begins to recruit, to change, to make a difference. We never saw it as being controversial. The way we saw it was, look, we know what the historical record says to us; and if we allow someone to dissuade us from this pursuit, then they continue to identify for us who we are and who we select. Now, those efforts were tried. Suggestions were made. “Why don’t you do it for this person as opposed to that? If you do that, we may consider allowing you to exhibit it or erect it here.” And there was

some—just going back over the minutes—there was some discussion among the committee about that and we took a vote: Do we even consider someone other than Vesey?

**Dr. Bernard Powers:** Keeping Vesey’s memory alive is important because he was an early institution builder; he was a leader in the relatively new A.M.E. church, which has meant much for Black [South] Carolinians. In addition, he saw the Black struggle in international terms. For example, Haiti had a place in Vesey’s conspiracy. Finally, White [South] Carolinians never recovered from

the knowledge of the Vesey Conspiracy, and this discomfort contributed to the coming of the Civil War and ultimately freedom for African Americans.

**Henry E. Darby:** Vesey needed the recognition he rightly deserves. Although I hold all abolitionists in high esteem, it was not Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, John Brown, Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner—it was Denmark Vesey who started the spark which [sic] culminated within [sic] the explosion at Ft. Sumter; and seldom, if ever, is his name mentioned when it comes to the Civil War. This generation, particularly of African-American educators, can no longer allow such a historical truth go unknown.



Curtis J. Franks at the Denmark Vesey Monument, Hampton Park, Charleston, SC. Photo by Daron Calhoun

## DENMARK VESEY'S INFLUENCE

**Dr. Bernard Powers:** Vesey's efforts were probably motivating forces that helped galvanize the emerging abolitionist movement. Even though Vesey's conspiracy never matured into a rebellion, people like David Walker, a Vesey contemporary, knew of him and may have even met him, as Walker spent time in Charleston just before discovery of the conspiracy. Walker mentions Vesey in his "Appeal" as a serious activist who ought to be emulated. Beyond this, other antebellum activists were familiar with Vesey and saw him as a role model. Henry Highland Garnet, the famous Black New York abolitionist, knew of Vesey and called upon his name and memory when, in 1843, Garnet gave his famous "Address to the Slaves," which urged them to use defensive force if necessary to get free. Finally, there are cases of Black Union soldiers rallying around Vesey's name during heated battles. So, yes, Vesey's memory and knowledge of him and what he intended won recognition for him as an important leader.

## DENMARK VESEY AND THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM MONUMENT COMMITTEE

**Curtis J. Franks:** The idea around that [,what to name the committee,] was to call attention to the fact that this whole notion of freedom and the spirit thereof is pervasive. It doesn't inhabit just one race of people. It's universal! It's worldwide! So what Europeans had in [freedom-fighting] experience, Vesey and the other African people wanted the same thing. So why not promote that part of it and speak to this desire that enslaved people had as well? And that's why we decided on that name.

## MEETINGS

**Curtis J. Franks:** When we first started out, we tried to meet monthly and for the most part we met...at the Avery Research Center...I want to make sure that I'm clear about the role of the Avery Research Center in its process because under the tenure of the directorships of Dr. [Marvin] Dulaney, Dr. [Karen] Chandler, and, of course, concluding with that of Dr. [Patricia] Lessane, space has always been provided for the committee to meet here. And in addition to the space, they've always made things available to us. And one can argue that the formation of that committee grew out of the Avery [Research] Center.

## CITY OF CHARLESTON'S ROLE

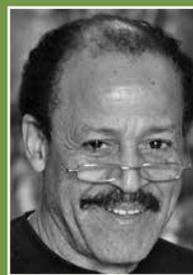
**Curtis J. Franks:** One of the things that the city offered—the City of Charleston—is [sic] through the Office of Cultural Affairs, under the leadership of Ellen Dressler Moryl, was a contact with the National Endowment for the Arts, a regional person out of Atlanta, who actually came and did a presentation for us and gave us some idea about possibilities. And the other part of that, in terms of the financial piece, was the City of Charleston—members of the city council I think it was, April of 2000—earmarked \$25,000 toward the monument and those monies were to come from accommodation taxes. So that early support was key. The majority of the money came through accommodation taxes, city, and the county council. The county council probably ended up \$65,000 to \$70,000 in excess. Not at one time, but across the years. Now a related part of that had to do with the fact that shortly

after that [initial] allocation, [we went before] the Arts and History Commission for the City of Charleston. Of course there is a procedure in place—significance of the monument, the objective, and all kinds of things—so we created those types of documents and submitted them... and they gave preliminary approval, because at that particular time, it was just a narrative. We were not very clear on the actual [monument] design ... So they gave preliminary approval to it. Thereafter, of course, what we did with funding, [and] later funding from Charleston County Council, was to do a call for artist.

## ARTIST CALL-PROCESS

**Curtis J. Franks:** It was done nationally through various trade magazines. We did this very slick brochure that we sent out. The person who worked a great deal with that, the editor of that piece, was Dr. Wilmot A. Fraser—who was a committee member—who worked very diligently on that brochure. There were a group of five to eight artists, I think, whose work [were considered]...and the key...the person who was on that subcommittee who did the yeomen's work was Ms. Dorothy Wright, arts educator and practicing visual artist, whose portrait of Vesey—in 1976 or there about—she executed. That particular work [was] for the City of Charleston; she was commissioned to do that work.

## THE ARTIST CHOSEN: ED DWIGHT



**Curtis J. Franks:** Mr. Dwight's work was quite impressive. He had many monuments that he had already completed throughout the country. And here again it's one of those things—and we didn't know this at the time—his wife's grandmother, I think, attended Avery Institute. I don't think that was in the criteria or anything, but it just shows you how central this place, meaning Charleston, has been for African people.

## THE COST

**Curtis J. Franks:** Initially, [in] Mr. Dwight's rendering of the monument there were to be three figures: Vesey flanked by Peter Poyas and Gullah Jack [two key Vesey partners]. The cost of that was supposed to be about in excess of \$400,000. About five years ago, Mr. Dwight had some health issues. Mr. Dwight is probably about 80 years old now, so he was about 75 years of age then. That was a concern of the committee even prior to him having these challenges because we recognize the fact that he was a senior/elder statesman, so to speak. He recovers and resumes his work and Mr. Dwight says to us, "I certainly want to finish this work...you only have about 33-35% of [money] required. So you might want to rethink this thing." And he said that even if we scale it down to [a] one-person [monument we were still short of the cost]. In the final analysis, he became the major contributor to the monument itself. He did it at a much-reduced rate for us. I think the Vesey project carried that kind of weight with him and for him, and he wanted to see it through.

## THE VESEY MONUMENT IN THE LANDSCAPE

**Curtis J. Franks:** It's one thing for people to say when you look at the African presence in North America, Charleston is a must see. It's one thing to make that contention, but it's something altogether different when you don't see visible signs of that, you know what I mean? And the Vesey monument and that whole effort was an effort much larger than just creating that monument. It was about bringing visible recognition to a place that is so prominent in the African-American experience and the development of this country. And to actually have seen people come [to Charleston] and be visibly disappointed in not seeing anything that resonated with them. [sic] So I'm saying a number of things here. I'm saying that on one level, the City of Charleston recognized that and through [sic] the use of accommodation taxes was critical in creating [the monument]. That's just one example of their support in redressing that.

**Dr. Bernard Powers:** The monument changes the landscape by now offering a counterpoint to those other monuments to white supremacy and slavery that populate Charleston's streets. The monument will help to ensure that Vesey remains alive in the memories of many more people who visit the site. Finally, the struggle to get the monument erected was a long and arduous one, but it ended in success and I feel confident that other organizations dedicated to progressive causes [will] take heart in this and be encouraged in their own endeavors.

**Henry E. Darby:** I was/am of the opinion if the Charleston community could erect a monument on Vesey, the Hampton community in Virginia and the Chicago community in Illinois could use our experience as an example to erect a monument on Nat Turner and Fred Hampton, respectively. Hopefully, the success within the Charleston community could serve as an example to other African Americans, liberal, and radical Whites to have other controversial and iconic historical figures erected who have been ignored, disregarded, discounted, or simply overlooked.



Denmark Vesey and The Spirit of Freedom Monument Committee members at unveiling program in Hampton Park, Charleston, SC. (l-r) Marion Welch, Henry E. Darby, Bernard Powers, Donald West  
Photo by Ramona LaRoche

† Quote taken from Frederick Douglass's speech "Men of Color, to Arms!", given in Rochester, NY on March 2, 1863

## MUSEUM NEWS

### Upcoming Exhibitions By Curtis J. Franks

#### **Cleveland L. Sellers: *The SNCC Years, Coming Through the Fire* • June-August 2014**

Originally curated in 2009 as part of the Avery Research Center's traveling exhibition program, this exhibition will reopen in 2014 in observance of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1964 Freedom Summer. Dr. Cleveland L. Sellers was born in Denmark, South Carolina and attended Howard University. While at Howard, Sellers became a member of the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG), an affiliate of SNCC (Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee). In 1964, Sellers joined SNCC's Mississippi Summer Project (also known as Freedom Summer) to organize African-American voter registration in Mississippi. Three civil rights activists, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner, were infamously murdered while working on this project. Sellers eventually was elected SNCC'S Program Secretary in 1965.

Today, Dr. Sellers is the president of Voorhees College in Denmark, South Carolina. This exhibition draws from the Cleveland Sellers archival collection at the Avery Research Center and features letters, newspapers, magazines, photographs, music, broadsides, and ephemera that document the Freedom Summer project.

#### ***The Marrow of Tradition: The Black Film in the American Cinematic Tradition* • September 2014-December 2014**

In conjunction with the Avery Research Center's symposium of the same title, this exhibition will trace the distinctive and evolving history of Black Cinema. Sheet music, posters, stamp cachets and covers, photographs, playbills, magazines, and other materials will highlight the work of African-American actors and filmmakers. Some of the featured performers will include Paul Robeson, Ivan Dixon, South Carolina's own Nina Mae McKinney, and Abbey Lincoln.

# PUBLIC HISTORY INITIATIVES

By Mary Battle, PhD

Spring 2014 was busy at the Avery Research Center! We sponsored a number of evening lectures, including a presentation by Dr. Amrita Myers about her recent publication, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston*; a talk by Dr. Marcus Cox about his publication, *Segregated Soldiers: Military Training at Historically Black Colleges in the Jim Crow South*; and a discussion with John Jennings entitled "The Souls of Black Comix" that highlighted his remarkable work as an artist and graphic novelist. We also co-hosted events with the College of Charleston's African American Studies Program, including a presentation by Alfred Conteh about his artwork, and a screening of *The Rosa Parks Story*, a film directed by visiting African American Studies professor Julie Dash. In addition, the Avery Research Center hosted film screenings of *Pariah with Southerners on New Ground (SONG)* and *The New Black* with the Alliance For Full Acceptance. Finally, we continued our monthly Avery Brown Bag Series, with presentations on topics ranging from Jonathan Green's artwork, to the role of white paternalism in the history of Morehouse College, to the significance of protest in art, to legal issues and solutions for protecting heirs' property ownership in Lowcountry African-American communities.

In March 2014, the Lowcountry Digital History Initiative (LDHI) (<http://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/>) also officially launched. In partnership with the Avery Research Center, a major goal of this exciting new digital project is to highlight underrepresented histories in the Lowcountry and historically interconnected Atlantic World sites. Many of the current LDHI online exhibitions address African-American history and culture and highlight materials from Avery Research Center's archives. As an ongoing project with the Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL), LDHI will continue to grow over time. In May 2014, LDHI published three new exhibitions:

## **CHARLESTON'S CIGAR FACTORY STRIKE, 1945-46**

This online exhibition provides an overview of *Charleston's Cigar Factory Strike, 1945-46*, as a distinctive moment in South Carolina's history when grassroots alliances led to massive protests and social justice advocacy.  
*Project Author: Dwana Waugh, North Carolina A&T State University*

## **KEEPER OF THE GATE: PHILIP SIMMONS IRONWORK IN CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA**

*Keeper of the Gate* outlines the history and work of Philip Simmons, a master blacksmith from Charleston, South Carolina.  
*Project Partner: Philip Simmons Foundation, Inc.*  
*Project Authors: Bernard Powers, John M. Vlach, and Claire Y. Greene*

## **VOYAGE OF THE ECHO: THE TRIALS OF AN ILLEGAL TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE SHIP**

*Voyage of the Echo* examines the world of the illegal trans-Atlantic slave trade by reconstructing the voyage of the slave ship *Echo* in 1858.  
*Project Author: John Harris, Johns Hopkins University*

*Special thanks to College of Charleston graduate assistants Bradley Blankemeyer, Beth Gniewek, and Andrew Cuadrado for their work on LDHI, and congratulations to them on graduating in May 2014!*

## Fall 2014

Mark your calendars for the following Avery Research Center events:

OCTOBER 9, 2014 • 6:00 PM

LECTURE/BOOK SIGNING: "Celebrating Toni Cade Bambara: A Life Free of Spiritual and Political Boundaries"  
Linda Holmes, Author

OCTOBER 17, 2014 • 7:00 PM

Fisk Jubilee Singers at Circular Congregational Church  
Co-sponsored by the Avery Research Center & the Colour of Music: Black Classical Musicians Festival  
Please see the Avery Research Center website for updates.

NOVEMBER 6, 2014 • 6:00 PM

PANEL PRESENTATION: "Performing Antebellum Charleston: Racial Theatrics in the Holy City"  
Radiclani Clytus, Brown University; Jacob Crane, Tufts University; Douglas Jones, Rutgers University

Co-sponsored by the Avery Research Center & the Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston

*We will also continue hosting our monthly Avery Brown Bag Series, speakers and dates to be announced. To stay up to date on all of our public events, please "like" the Avery Research Center Facebook page, request to join our email list, and regularly check our Programs page on the Avery Research Center's website: <http://avery.cofc.edu/programs/>*

## CAPTIVATING YOUNG MINDS: AN INTRODUCTION TO ARCHIVES

The archives are a fundamental component of Avery Research Center's education outreach initiatives. As a young student, I had very little understanding of archival research. Then Susan Williams, my freshman English Professor, encouraged me to explore primary sources in research, thus beginning my journey in exploring archives. Unfortunately, it is quite common for students, even at the undergraduate level, to have little knowledge or understanding of archival research. Because of my experience, I have made it my mission to include the importance of archives in our outreach initiatives.

I approached Avery Research Center's Manager of Archival Services, Aaron Spelbring, about reaching out to secondary school students to introduce them to Avery Research Center's archives. Spelbring was fully onboard with the idea! I partnered with YoArt of Charleston through Corie Hipp, a Video Production and Photography Coordinator. Corie was leading a small group of students from Sanders-Clyde Elementary in developing a film project that required research in our collections. The film project focused on "change" and three influential figures during the Civil Rights Movement—Millicent Brown, Bill Saunders, and Leila Potts-Campbell. The students' task was to conduct oral interviews, explore Avery Research Center's archives for additional information, and link the stories together. Because the

*"I am so proud of my girls and their enthusiasm. This is going to be such a fun project – thank you!"*

Corie Hipp, Yo-Art

students were so engaged during this introductory session, Avery Research Center will host a summer presentation of the film project, highlighting the work of the students.

In addition to this special project, we have continued a partnership with Stall High School in conducting oral history workshops. Dr. Mary Battle, Public Historian, and I improved upon the 2013 workshop and implemented more steps for how to conduct oral histories. We also discussed problems encountered when conducting oral history interviews. The knowledge students' gain by exploring the archives and learning how to conduct oral histories captivate and enhance the students' ability to process facts and meanings while expanding their understanding of connecting people to places and events. The inclusion of Avery Research Center's archives in outreach initiatives affords us the opportunity to connect students to their community in a more profound and lasting manner.

*"It was a great authentic experience for our students!"*

Allison Hollis, Teacher Stall H.S.



Avery Research Center staff with Sanders-Clyde YoArt participants: 1st Row: (l-r) Kiera Early, Kierra Wellington, Kanisha Coleman. 2nd Row: (l-r) Aaron Spelbring, Shelia Harrell-Roye, Corie Hipp, Brenda T. Williams, Gene Furchgott. 3rd Row: (l-r) Gail Blair, Leslie Scanlan.

INTERESTED IN A SPECIALLY CRAFTED EDUCATION TOUR?

Contact: Shelia Harrell-Roye,  
Education Outreach Coordinator  
email: seharrel@cofc.edu  
phone: 843.953.7613



Stall High School students participating in Oral History workshop at the Avery Research Center

# Finding VERTAMAE SMART-GROSVENOR

American Icon ☉ Culinary Griot ☉ Citizen of the World

## The Making of a Lowcountry Documentary

By Patricia Williams Lessane, PhD

I first met Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor in 2011 when she attended The Avery Research Center's celebration of Julie Dash's iconic film, *Daughters of the Dust*. Having seen her work in *Daughters* and Oprah Winfrey's production of *Beloved*, I was excited to meet this larger-than-life Lowcountry native. The author of three books, including the critically acclaimed *Vibration Cooking: or, The Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*, Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor has led a remarkably unique and complex life. Born April 4, 1938 in Hampton County, South Carolina, Vertamae—as she is affectionately known by people around the globe—has always let her imagination guide her. Such free spirit and forward thinking was unusual for Gullah Geechee girls in rural South Carolina. To say Vertamae has always been “different” would be an understatement. The daughter of Clara and Frank Smart, Vertamae's tiny body resembled that of a “kuta,” the Gullah term for turtle. Small in stature, the baby girl was a fighter who survived a tumultuous delivery and came into the world without her twin brother. Sula Ritter, Vertamae's maternal grandmother, remarked to her son-in-law matter-of-factly: “Da boy da weight like ov'r a five-pound bag gah sugar (6lbs); the gal da weight like a five-pound bag gah sugar gah sugar little ov'r half full (3lbs). The boy dead and the gal 'bout ta be dead.”

**While most known for her epicurean gift as a “culinary anthropologist,” Vertamae's influence on Americana is more far reaching than one would imagine.**

Today, at age 75, Vertamae lives in Ridgeland, South Carolina. Surrounded by photos and other historical ephemera documenting an exceptional life in the arts, Vertamae is a breathing treasure trove of stories about her experiences with some of the most influential artists, writers, actors, and musical performers of the twentieth century. Her long-standing friendships with the late African-American novelist

and poet Maya Angelou and South African jazz musician Hugh Masekela reflect the wide circle of people she has called friends. Perhaps her most complex, yet fulfilling, relationships were with the iconic Nina Simone and actor Calvin Lockhart. With Simone, Vertamae shared a deep friendship that often resembled sibling rivalry. Their Southern roots and deep love for their children and Black culture kept their friendship alive until Simone's death. But it was her on-again, off-again love affair with the Bahamian actor Calvin Lockhart that brought her the most joy and the most sorrow. When asked about the nature of their relationship, she simply responds, “We were each other's everything.”



Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor

While most known for her epicurean gift as a “culinary anthropologist,” Vertamae's influence on Americana is more far reaching than one would imagine. Unwilling to conform to the limited possibilities imposed on Black Americans, she, too, sought freedom. A singer, dancer, and writer, she left the United States and came of age in the Beat Hotel on the Left Bank of Paris, France in 1956. Vertamae was drawn

to the creativity and acceptance she found amongst the colony of expat artists and writers, including American writer Jonathon Kozol, the French painter Lucien Fleury, and the Scottish folk singer Alex Campbell. It was there in the Beat Hotel that she met her first husband, sculptor Bob Grosvenor. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of scholarly interest in the Beat Movement. Yet much of this literature focuses on the work of figures such as Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac. Very little is written about Vertamae's role in, and experience with, this movement.

“*Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*” is the working title of a feature-length documentary that will chronicle Vertamae's unconventional career as a writer, dancer, muse, actor, costume designer, broadcaster, and, yes, culinary ambassador. Directed by Julie Dash and produced by the Avery Research Center, the film will trace her journeys from the Lowcountry of South Carolina, to Philadelphia, then Paris, and her life at the Beat Hotel. It will spotlight this master storyteller, placing her squarely as an active participant and living witness to two twentieth-century arts movements—the Beat Movement and the Black Arts Movement. The documentary will then follow her journey back from Paris to New York, on the road again as a Space Goddess in Sun Ra's Solar Myth Science Arkestra, and as associate, friend, confidant, and cook to such artists as Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Charles Fuller, Hoyt Fuller, Rosa Guy, and her second husband, the abstract painter, Elsworth Ausby. Vertamae's story will come to life through her own unique storytelling style, the voices of those who knew her, the images and sounds, and extant locales of the times—all punctuated by her recipes for both food and for living. Production on the film is set to begin in August 2014.

## Avery Research Center Symposium

# The Marrow of Tradition: The Black Film in the American Cinematic Tradition

September 17-20, 2014



The 2014 Avery Research Center Symposium, "The Marrow of Tradition: The Black Film in the American Cinematic Tradition," will screen and highlight the work of African-American filmmakers and generate critical dialogue about the Black film tradition and the salient ways issues of race, class, gender, oppression, resistance, and liberation struggles have historically inculcated in the work of radical pioneers of race film and the many who followed in their footsteps.

We take the name from the theme of Charles Chesnut's remarkable novel of the same title. A fearless commentator on racial violence and injustice, Chesnut's novel chronicles the events that lead to a fictional race riot in Wellington, North Carolina. Drawing from the actual heinous events of the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898, Chesnut's novel follows the complex and tragic lives of Black and White inhabitants whose lives and stations in life are demarcated by race and class, yet are nonetheless inextricably tied together by tragedy, circumstance, and blood. We draw from Chesnut's words this year because they inspired the work of Black film pioneer, Oscar Micheaux.

Tentative programming includes keynote speakers; a State of the Field panel; "The Black Documentary Film Tradition" panel; and a panel discussion on "Black Political Thought in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*." Featured screenings will include *Nothing But a Man* (1964) to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the film's release.

Invited speakers include independent filmmakers Julie Dash and Byron Hurt, film critic Greg Tate, Rachel Watanabe-Batton (Directors Guild), Vida Cornelious (GlobalHue Ad Agency), Mark Anthony Neal (Duke University), Farah Jasmine Griffin (Columbia University), and Michael T. Martin (Indiana University).

For a full schedule of events and registration information, visit our website: <http://avery.cofc.edu/conferences>.

### AVERY RESEARCH CENTER STAFF NEWS



#### FEATURING MONICA DOWNEY...

Ms. Downey worked as an intern at the Avery Research Center during May 2014. A senior at Francis Marion University majoring in English and minoring in History, she worked in the Reading Room and completed tour guide training. Monica describes herself as coming "from a long line of native

Gullah Geechie people here in Charleston, SC" and says she eventually plans to work in Public Relations. Of her work at the Avery Research Center, Monica says, "My experience... has been enlightening and inspirational."

•During June 2014, **Patricia Williams Lessane** attended Harvard Institutes for Higher Education two-week Management Development Program for mid-level administrators in higher education. She also traveled to Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, UK to help plan the 2015 Collegium for African American Research (CAAR) conference on "Memory, Imagination & Liberation in the African Diaspora." The June 2015 conference will be held at the Liverpool Hope University in Liverpool, UK.

•**Curtis J. Franks** attended *Freedom Summer 1964 50th Anniversary Conference*. Conferees gathered in Jackson, Mississippi from June 25-June 29, 2014 to examine the legacies of civil rights activism.

•In July 2014, **Mary Battle** is traveling to Liverpool, UK to the International Slavery Museum, University of Liverpool to discuss potential project collaborations with the Avery Research Center and the Carolina Lowcountry & Atlantic World Program (CLAW).

•In July, 2014, **Shelia Harrell-Roye** and **Mary Battle** will represent the Avery Research Center at the Yale Public History Institute. This annual institute which focuses on interpretation of African American history, is hosted by the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, in partnership with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

•In January 2014, **Savannah Frierson** traveled to Cuba with fellow alumni from Harvard University. Site visits and discussions focused on Cuba's changing economic landscape, the syncretic Afro-Caribbean religion of *Santería*, and how Europeans, Africans, and indigenous Cubans have shaped Cuban culture.

#### CONGRATULATIONS TO AVERY RESEARCH CENTER 2014 COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON GRADUATES!

**Shelia Harrell-Roye** M.A., History (Staff)  
**Elizabeth Wilkins** M.A., History (Graduate Asst.)  
**Daron Calhoun** M.A., History (Graduate Asst.)



## Avery Institute Membership NEWS

**Tony Bell, Membership Chairman**

Greetings!

It's been another busy year at the Avery Research Center. I hope you have been taking advantage of all the wonderful programs.

The membership committee is busy updating member information on our respective lists. We want to ensure that members receive all pertinent information. Also, remember to visit us online at [www.averyinstitute.us](http://www.averyinstitute.us) to see what's new. Thank you for helping us to ensure that the Avery Research Center remains the community jewel and national treasure it is.

We appreciate your continued support. If you have any questions, please email us at: [averyinstitute@gmail.com](mailto:averyinstitute@gmail.com).



## Memorials

Dr. Fostenia W. Baker  
*in memory of*  
Frazier B. Baker and daughter Julia Baker

Marie & Nelson Simpson  
*in memory of*  
Marie & Harold C. Houston

Patrick & Annette Strickland  
*in memory of*  
John L. Dart & Susan D. Butler, descendant, Ernette Strickland

Ms. Catherine Braxton  
*in memory of*  
Willis & Rebecca Johnson, Sr.

Ms. Mildred Carr  
*in memory of*  
John W. Carr, Sr.

Loretta Hughes  
*in memory of*  
Jerry Leon Hughes

Phyllis Morrison  
*in memory of*  
Robert F. Morrison (Avery Class 1938)

Rosmond Whipper-Black  
*in memory of*  
Ogretta Houray

Dr. Barbara Williams Jenkins  
*in memory of*  
Herbert DeCosta, Jr.

Dana Berlin Starge  
*in memory of*  
Jestine Matthews



## We Remember

FROM THE AVERY INSTITUTE CLASS OF 1940  
by Cynthia McCottry-Smith

The year 1990 was special for many reasons. The Avery Research Center for American History and Culture was formally opened to the world at large and it was the fiftieth anniversary of Avery Normal Institute's Class of 1940. After many meetings at 31 Percy Street and the dental office of Dr. James E. Brown, the weekend finally had arrived for our fiftieth anniversary celebration; and out of a class of sixty, thirty-seven still were alive and seventeen participated in the reunion activities. Present were Richard Hunt, President; Judge Richard E. Fields, Vice-President; Julia Magwood-Harris, Treasurer; Cynthia McCottry-Smith, Secretary; Isabel Evans Broughton; Jametta White Martin; Virgie Evans Shokes; Alma Lumpkin Rimmer; Marie Wragg Randolph; Julia Fields Jennings; Mary White Frasier; Herbert DeCosta; Susie Rouse James; Dr. James E. Brown; Dr. Lela Haynes Session; and the Honorable Hilda Hutchinson Jefferson. Unfortunately, Clayton Harleston had been too ill and was not able to attend the festivities. Other local members did not respond and we truly had missed them.

The Class of 1940 grew up in a time that is so vastly different from today's society. We were born before television, penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, plastic contact lenses, Frisbees, and the Pill. There were no fast food restaurants and outer space was just a myth. We had five-cent and ten-cent stores and ice cream cones were a nickel or a dime. To ride the street car or trolley, it cost a nickel; a Chevy Coupe was \$600.00; and gas was eleven cents a gallon. Cigarette smoking was fashionable and Coke was a cold drink. Grass was mowed and we could pray in school. Computers did not exist and the idea of an African-American president was unthinkable. Look at how times have changed!

I think out of our sixty classmates, only about twelve of us are active and living it up seventy-four years later. We survived; and so in 2014, it is time for us to celebrate. We are blessed for the lives that we live, for all who helped to mold and shape us, and for dear Avery Institute that gave us a head start in life. God bless the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture Staff, and God bless President Obama and the United States of America. We are truly blessed.

# EVERY MEMBERSHIP INSTITUTE

## 2013-2014

### HONORARY LIFE

Vivienne Anderson  
Elmore Brown  
Dr. Wendell F. Cox  
Herbert and Emily DeCosta  
Judge Richard E. Fields  
Phillip Simmons  
Lois Simms  
Honorable Lucille Whipper

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**THE AVERY RESEARCH CENTER  
THANKS  
MARK LATTANZIO, OMAR RAMBERAN,  
AND THE ENTIRE SUNTRUST TEAM  
FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT.**



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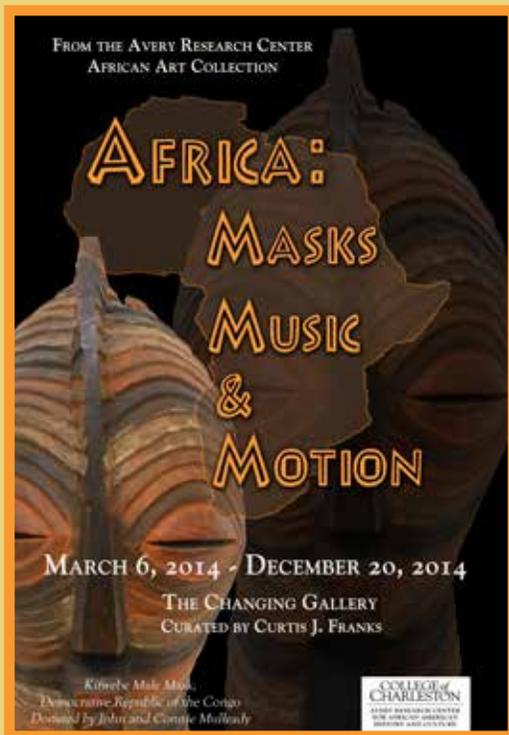
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**The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture is located at 125 Bull Street, Charleston, SC 29424.**

**Tours** of the MUSEUM GALLERIES are conducted five times a day, Monday through Friday (10:30a.m., 11:30a.m., 1:30p.m., 2:30p.m., and 3:30 p.m.) except on College of Charleston holidays and winter break. Group tours of 5 or more and Saturday tours are by appointment only. Admission by donation. 843.953.7609

**Avery Research Center Museum through December 20, 2014**



**The Phillis Wheatley Literary and Social Club Reading Room** is open to the public year-round, Monday through Friday, between the hours of 10:00a.m.-12:30p.m and 1:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m. except College of Charleston holidays and winter break. To contact the Reading Room, call 843.953.7608.

The Avery Research Center is handicapped accessible. Limited parking is available in our parking lot.

**Visit our Web site** for more information: <http://avery.cofc.edu>.

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